

Evening Telegraph

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 7, 1864.

UNLAWFUL CURES.

The strength of imagination in effecting wonderful cures has been observed in all ages; and Avenicia declares that he "prefers confidence before art, precepts, and all remedies whatever." Our learned Burton says that "this strong imagination of conceit is *Astrum Humanus*, and the rudder of this our ship, which reason should steer, but overborne by phantastic, caning, manage, and so suffers itself and the whole vessel of ours to be overruled and often overturned."

Nothing could be more absurd than the notions regarding some of the supposed cures. A ring made of the hump of a calf had the power of relieving cramps; which were also mitigated by having a rusty old sword hung up by the outside. Nails driven in an oak tree prevented the toothache; and a bather that had served in hanging a criminal was an infallible remedy for headache, when tied round the head; and a portion was equally cured by the moss growing on the same skull, dried and powdered, and taken as a capsaicin snuff. A dead man's hand could dispel tumors of the glands by stroking the parts nine times, but the hand of a man who had been cut down from the gallows was the most efficacious. To cure warts, one had no hing to do but spell a piece of leath from the butcher, with which the warts were to be rubbed; then inter it in any hilt, and as it rotted the wart would wither and fall.

The chips of a gallows on which several persons had been hanged, when worn in a bag round the neck, would cure the ague. A stone with a hole in it, suspended at the head of the bed, would effectually stop the nightmare; hence it was called a hog-stone, as it prevents the troublesome visions from sitting upon the sleeper's stomach.

These amulet ties to the key of a stable-horse, to force witches from riding horses over the country.

Hickory children were cured by being drawn through a cleft tree, which was afterwards bound up, and as the split wood united the child acquired strength. Creeping through a perforated stone to cure various disorders was a Druidical rite, still practised in the East. In the parish of Mardon there is a stone with a hole in it fourteen inches long, through which children are drawn for the rickets, and in the North infants are made to pass through a hole cut in a grassy cheeze the day of their christening.

Second-sight, which, as an hereditary faculty, was deemed a malady, was cured in the Isle of Man, according to Mr. Aubrey's account, by baptizing a child upon the first sight of his head. This ceremony exempts the succeeding generation from the troublesome gift.

It is a melancholy reflection that at various periods of our history we have resorted in spiritual aid to promote their sooth or malignant views. Chiroomancers have quoted the Bible in support of their doctrines, and addressed the following lines of Job:—"He stretched up the hand of every man, that all men may know his works;" while, in like manner, the Holy Inquisition of Spain and Portugal justified their atrocities on the score of the parable of the mardage of King's son, in the twenty-second of St. Matthew.

Unlawful cures, as they were called, being thus anathematized, lawful remedies were resorted to, and the patient was ordered to pray with due devotion before he took the physic; or, as Burton observes, not one without the other, but both together; for, as he adds, to pray alone and reject ordinary means, is to do like him in Asop, that when his cart was stalled, lay flat on his back and cry out, "Help, Heracles!" However,

Hyrcanus reminds us that physicians can hope for success unless "a true faith is cast upon God, and teach their patients to do like the Corminees, when he addressed the Christian princes after the overthrow of Charles of Burgundy, bade them "first pray with all submission and penitency, confess their sins, and then take physic."

But why should we marvel at the credulity and superstition of our forefathers, when we daily observe similar qualities among others, spiritualists, fanatics, and bigots, who will strive to speculate on human weakness, and endeavor to surround with impenetrable mists every Rebe to their power who gropes for the shrine of reason and of truth. Johanna Southcote had her voracious, and Prince Hohenlohe was considered by many a pious person as a vicious instrument of divine mercy.

How appropriate are the lines of Otway when applied to the propagators of such absurdities, who dare to call upon our faith to give credence to their imposture!—

"You want to lead
My reason blindfold, like a humped lion
Check'd in his noble visage; then, when baited
Down to his instant tameness, make it crook
A stony staff, and, passing like a serpent,
So silly sons are good for, and you get none."

A curious anecdote is related of Lord Chief Justice Holt. When a young man he happened with some of his merry companions, to run up a score at a country inn which they were not able to pay. In this dilemma they appealed to Holt to get them out of the scrape. Our young lawyer had observed the innkeeper's daughter looked very pale, and, passing by her, he asked her if she was informed that she suffered from anague. Holt immediately gathered various plants, mixed them up with great ceremony, and after rolling them up in parchment, scrawled upon the ball some cabalistic characters. The amulet thus prepared he suspended round the neck of the young woman, and, strange to say, the ague did not return. After this cure the doctor offered to pay the bill, to which the grateful landlord would not consent, allowing Holt and his party to leave the house.

Many years after, when on the bench, a woman was brought before him accused of witchcraft—the very last person tried upon such a charge. Her only defense was that she possessed a ball invariably efficacious in the cure of agues. The charm was produced, handed to the judge, who recognized the identical ball which he had prepared in his youthful frolics.

Not only did those victims of superstition firmly believe that evil spirits had the power of inflicting disease, and afterward salve the mischief, but there were also invested with the power of killing and subsequently restoring to life. The story related of the truly learned Agricola, who was falsely represented as a necromancer, is curious.

Agricola had occasion one time to be absent for a few days from his residence at Louvain. During his absence he entrusted his wife with the key of his museum, but with an earnest injunction that she should not open it, unless he should be compelled to enter it. Agricola happened at this time to have a brazier in the house, a young fellow of insatiable curiosity, who constantly implored the master of the museum to let him see it. The master of the museum, however, refused, and the boy, in a fit of pique, broke the door open and expired. Simona, accused of being his assassin, was brought before a magistrate, who ordered an immediate investigation of the master, when, on producing the brazier, he was informed that she suffered from anague. Holt immediately gathered various plants, mixed them up with great ceremony, and after rolling them up in parchment, scrawled upon the ball some cabalistic characters. The amulet thus prepared he suspended round the neck of the young woman, and, strange to say, the ague did not return. After this cure the doctor offered to pay the bill, to which the grateful landlord would not consent, allowing Holt and his party to leave the house.

Regarding unlawful cures, have we not seen some cases where the physician, condemned from the very first as an impotent infirm, in a disease which seemed to have been assigned to him by the Creator as an inevitable doom? Did not these desperate bigots even pronounce that we were not warranted to seek in the brute creation a human remedy or preservation? What is still more worthy of remark is the coincidence of a similar idea in India, where the greatest obstacle vaccination encountered arose from a popular and malignant superstition, condemned from the very first as an impotent infirm, in a disease which seemed to have been assigned to him by the Creator as an inevitable doom?

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